

Suspected online predator friending hundreds of Utah girls

By Haley Smith

November 15th, 2013

WEST POINT, Davis County — Police are searching for a suspected predator who has been contacting hundreds of girls at schools in Davis county via social media and text message. Police say this serves as a good reminder to parents make sure your child's security settings on social media are at the highest level.

The Davis County Sheriff's department said students at West Point Junior High started filing the reports Thursday morning.

The man, who claims to be around 20 years old, gets the students' information after they "accept" his friend request online. From there, he tracks any personal information they have posted, including phone numbers, pictures or even their weekend plans.

"We don't know if this is a juvenile that's playing a prank, maybe they think it's funny, but there are some concerned students and parents, so we are taking it seriously," said Deputy Geoff Hasty from the Davis County Sheriff's Department.

"We don't know if this is a juvenile that's playing a prank, maybe they think it's funny, but there are some concerned students and parents, so we are taking it seriously."

—Deputy Geoff Hasty

Hasty said that just last Friday, the sheriff's department held an online security assembly at West Point talking about safety on social media. That's why he believes so many girls immediately came forward when conversations online or over texts became uncomfortable and in some cases inappropriate.

"It takes a little bit of time to track the internet use and find out who they are," Hasty said. "Again with social media, you can create a page and represent yourself however you want.

Hasty has advice for parents with kids who use social media.

"Keep all your social media set to privacy and really only accept friends with people you know for sure and not someone who could be misinterpreting themselves," Hasty said.

West Point isn't the only school targeted by this unknown predator. Several high schools in the area, including Syracuse Junior High and spanning up to North Ogden have had reports of this same individual.

The sheriff's department says multiple agencies are working on this issue now, including the internet crime detectives, to figure out the identity of the individual.

Hasty said if anyone else out there has had an experience like this recently should keep a record

of the conversations and notify police.